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SENSITIVE  
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TAGS: [KDEM](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KCRM](#) [PINR](#) [UNMIK](#) [YI](#)

SUBJECT: KOSOVO SERB POLITICIANS VIE FOR POWER IN PRISTINA;  
MINISTER HOLDS ON TO HIS PARTY (FOR NOW)

REF: 04 PRISTINA 1522 - C

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED, PROTECT ACCORDINGLY

11. (SBU) SUMMARY. After several tumultuous months, the Serbian Democratic Party -- the only Kosovo Serb party actively participating in the Kosovo government -- held an extraordinary party assembly on April 29 and re-elected Slavisa Petkovic as party president over the protests of a strong minority of party members. Break-away faction leader Dragisa Miric has accused Petkovic of malfeasance. Former party manager and returns ministry permanent secretary Mihailo Scepanovic, who was denied entry to the assembly, is starting his own party. However much infighting the party exhibits, its members are united in seeing their future in Kosovo and their political center as Pristina rather than Belgrade. END SUMMARY.

SDS EAGER TO CONTINUE ENGAGEMENT IN KOSOVO INSTITUTIONS  
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12. (SBU) The OSCE registered the Serbian Democratic Party of Kosovo and Metohija (SDS) in April 2005 as the successor to the "Citizen's Initiative of Serbia" (GIS). The GIS has two of the ten set-aside seats reserved for Kosovo Serbs in the Kosovo Assembly in 2004, and actively participates as part of the governing coalition (Reftel). (NOTE. The other eight seats went to the Serbian List for Kosovo and Metohija (SLKM). The SLKM, led by Oliver Ivanovic, has never assumed those seats, claiming that they lack necessary support from Belgrade. END NOTE.) Former Prime Minister (PM) Ramush Haradinaj appointed SDS party president Slavisa Petkovic Minister for Communities and Returns, also in fulfillment of a minority set-aside requirement.

13. (SBU) Since January 2006, SDS Vice President (VP) Dragisa Miric has been trying to replace Petkovic as party president. He says Petkovic has refused to meet with the SDS vice presidents or the main committee for seven months. According to Miric, the main board dismissed Petkovic as party president on January 16, alleging violations of the party

statute and the misuse of 17,000 euros of party funds. After the OSCE told Miric that the dismissal of a party president must take place at a general assembly of the party, he organized a meeting of his supporters on February 4 in Vushtri/Vucitern, at which participants lodged a vote of "no confidence" against Petkovic and purportedly dismissed him as party president. The OSCE ruled the February 4 assembly illegitimate, since it was not called with the 30 days notice required by the party statute. The OSCE asked the SDS to convene an extraordinary assembly to resolve their disputes.

¶4. (SBU) On March 5 the Miric faction wrote to SRSG Soren Jessen-Petersen requesting that Miric, as the "authorized representative" of the party, replace Petkovic as returns minister. On March 8 Miric also met with PM Ceku and asked to replace Petkovic as minister. However, Miric told us he believes the SRSG supported keeping Petkovic as Minister because he was the first Kosovo Serb to come forward and actively participate in the Kosovo government.

#### PETKOVIC RE-ELECTED SDS PRESIDENT AT EXTRAORDINARY ASSEMBLY

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¶5. (SBU) In late March, Petkovic complied with the OSCE request and scheduled an extraordinary assembly to take place on April 29 at Pristina's Grand Hotel. In an April 25 meeting with PolOff and PolFSN, Miric accused Petkovic of severe infractions of both UNMIK regulations and the SDS party statute in an attempt to assert control of the SDS. He claimed the delegate lists were manipulated and falsified to favor Petkovic and exclude Miric supporters. Regardless, Miric issued a press release on April 27 urging his supporters to participate, saying the SDS truly represents the Serb community in Kosovo.

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¶6. (SBU) Artan Alijaj of the National Democratic Institute (NDI) (who observed the April 29 assembly) told PolOff and PolFSN on May 3 that Miric and two supporters were among the 102 delegates who attended the assembly. Alijaj said the Miric block voted for the agenda, and then quietly left the building. The assembly then voted on a single slate (with no opposition candidates) for party officials headed by Petkovic (who was re-elected party president). He said 92 delegates voted in favor, two against, and the rest abstained. (COMMENT. Although Miric clearly has some support and genuinely wants to participate in Kosovo's future, he apparently lacks the wherewithal to oust Petkovic. END COMMENT.)

¶7. (SBU) Kim Vetting of OSCE's Central Governance Unit told PolOff he had no procedural objection to what he witnessed at the assembly. Vetting said about 150 Serbs from both Kosovo and Serbia proper attended, although not all were delegates. He said internal OSCE correspondence indicates the OSCE will find the convention "legal and in line with democratic principles" unless they receive complaints within ten days from delegates claiming that they were not invited or were denied access.

#### SDS IS NOT TIED TO BELGRADE

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¶8. (SBU) The SDS convention was the first held by a Serb party in Pristina since 1999. Petkovic said his party chose Kosovo's capital to demonstrate that SDS is a party of integration and co-existence. He said, "The fact that so many Serbs are gathered today in the center of Pristina without KFOR or armed escort speaks for itself."

¶9. (SBU) Miric said the SDS is the only party that truly represents Kosovo Serbs who want to stay in Kosovo. He explained that the SDS recognizes Agim Ceku as PM, wants to participate in all Kosovo institutions, supports multi-ethnicity in Kosovo and is ready to work with everyone

who lives here. He asserted they want to "forget the past" and are "not interested in Belgrade politicians." He says SDS members "think for themselves" and do not depend on Belgrade. Miric said if the SLKM chooses not to participate, then the Kosovo government should welcome him and his supporters instead. He said he wants Belgrade to stop manipulating Kosovo Serbs for political gain and to allow status to be determined by the people who live in Kosovo.

#### POSSIBLE ALLY IN MIHAILO SCEPANOVIC'S OWN NEW PARTY

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¶10. (SBU) Former SDS party manager and permanent secretary of the returns ministry Mihailo Scepjanovic told PolOff and PolFSN the SDS is hopelessly fractured, and he is working to register and launch his own Serbian People's Party (SNS). He expressed his willingness to cooperate in a coalition with Miric and other Kosovo Serb leaders like the SLKM's Oliver Ivanovic.

¶11. (SBU) Scepjanovic said Petkovic expelled him from his position at the returns ministry on February 8. In response, Scepjanovic filed legal proceedings against Petkovic, claiming only UNMIK has the right to dismiss a permanent secretary. He said Petkovic has broken all ties and relationships with both local and international partners, and lamented that an entire year had been lost for implementing returns. Petkovic also expelled Scepjanovic from his position as SDS party manager.

¶12. (SBU) Alijaj said Scepjanovic, along with several other Miric supporters, was denied access to the April 29 assembly by Kosovo Police Service (KPS) and private security guards. (COMMENT. Compared to Miric, Scepjanovic is an experienced and outspoken politician, who might well have taken on

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Petkovic publicly. Scepjanovic has accused Petkovic of corruption, and claims to have evidence to support his claims. In return, Petkovic has reportedly accused Scepjanovic of corruption in his written response to PM Ceku responding to an audit of the ministry. END COMMENT.)

#### OUTLOOK FOR KOSOVO SERB POLITICAL PARTIES

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¶13. (SBU) NDI Senior Program Officer and former Bosnian Serb MP Zoran Blagojevic told PolOff and PolFSN on May 3 he believes both Petkovic and Miric violated the SDS party statute. He said the statute mandates that assembly delegates be elected by local party branches; however, there are almost no SDS branches and Petkovic instead hand-picked many of the delegates who voted for him on the 29th.

¶14. (SBU) Blagojevic said Scepjanovic has real support among Kosovo Serbs (especially in the north) and has potential to achieve success with his new party. Blagojevic believes a coalition could be created between Oliver Ivanovic's Social Democratic Party (SDP), Scepjanovic's SNS and the new Autonomous Liberal Party (SLS), which held its founding assembly in January 2006 in Gracanica. (NOTE. SLS President Slobodan Petrovic said the SLS is committed to representing and defending the interests and values of the Serbian community in and outside of Kosovo, while respecting the civil, democratic and human rights of other Kosovo communities. END NOTE.) Blagojevic said NDI will work with Miric if he decides to launch a new party as an offshoot of Petkovic's SDS, but believes Miric lacks the funding and skills to do so.

¶15. (SBU) COMMENT. We are encouraged that leaders of a Kosovo Serb political party have worked up obviously passionate interest in Kosovo politics. On the level of internal SDS politics, we applaud efforts to hold Minister Petkovic to account. On a broader level, we strongly applaud the efforts of the SDS to fill the Kosovo Serb leadership

void in a forum that is not reliant on Belgrade. END COMMENT.

¶16. (U) Post clears this message in its entirety for  
release to Special Envoy Ahtisaari.  
GOLDBERG